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CIA Reviewing Pelton Article, Speakes Says

Associated Press

The Central Intelligence Agency is reviewing an article published yesterday on the Ronald W. Pelton spy case to determine whether it broke a law barring the disclosure of intelligence secrets, White House spokesman Larry Speakes said.

The Washington Post, in an article on secrets that Pelton allegedly sold the Soviet Union for $35,000, said in yesterday's editions that it had withheld a description of betrayed technology after President Reagan, CIA Director William J. Casey and other administration officials urged the newspaper not to publish the material.

Speakes said the Post article "is presently being analyzed by the CIA to see if they have any specific problems with it. They have not indicated either way."

Asked if The Post had acted responsibly in withholding some information from the article, Speakes said, "We've certainly had some conversations with them that had a very responsible tone . . . ," but he added that it would be up to the CIA to make a judgment on whether to seek Justice Department prosecution.

The newspaper's counsel, Boisfeuillet Jones Jr., said he had received no indication that the government would seek to prosecute The Post under the law, passed in 1950, to block disclosure of intelligence-gathering activities. No news organization has ever been prosecuted under that law.

CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson, asked why the government sought to block publication of material allegedly obtained by the Kremlin, said the agency could not be sure that the information transmitted by Pelton was the same as that collected by Post reporters.

"In this business, I don't know that you presume the information is the same," she said.

She said she did not know whether Casey would refer the Post report to the Justice Department. Casey has already asked the department to weigh criminal charges against NBC for a report the television network broadcast about the Pelton case Monday.

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